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1956

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Middle of the Night"

New York Post

February 9, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Return of Edward G. Robinson

In "Middle of the Night," Paddy Chayefsky reveals for theater audiences that he is a skillful slice-of-life writer with the soul of a romantic, which, I gather, is no secret to television-watchers and moviegoers. The author of "Marty" is telling the rueful story of the love of a middle-aged business man for a young girl, and, thanks in great part to the superb and moving performance of Edward G. Robinson in the leading role, the result is a touching and interesting drama that combines realism with sentiment in expertly showmanlike proportions.

At the ANTA Theater last night, where "Middle of the Night" had its opening performance, it was Mr. Robinson's contribution that seemed of primary importance. The veteran actor has lost none of his theatrical cunning during his quarter-century in Hollywood, and he has gained, I think, new depths and compassion. There is great tenderness in his playing of the distraught elderly lover, as well as tact and restraint, and he succeeds in being deeply poignant without ever slopping over into saccharinity or ceasing to be a figure of dignity and stature.

In fact, it is that ability to add dramatic stature to the man he is portraying which chiefly gives "Middle of the Night" its major value as a play. Mr. Chayefsky observes and writes with realistic insight, sets down the speech of commonplace people with what appears to be unfailing accuracy, and is capable upon occasion of moments of eloquence. He can also tell a story forthrightly. But his drama, with its perhaps debatable ending, likewise seems restricted and lacking in over tones, and it is Mr. Robinson who lifts it to tragic dignity by his performance.

The play's weakness, I believe, lies in the characterization of the girl. The young actress named Gena Rowlands, who has the role, begins, it seems to me, much too vehemently, but after that she is properly moving. What bothered me is that the part itself appeared written to suggest a girl with physical and emotional demands less capable of appreciating and requiring the older man's tenderness than the more robust attributes of the violent young band leader she had married. I couldn't help suspecting the husband was actually the right man for her.

The Lesser Characters

If the heroine didn't strike me as drawn with complete credibility, the minor characters most certainly did. Mr. Chayefsky demonstrates admirable skill in setting down in a few incisive strokes such people as the girl's hard-working but foolish mother, the vulgar and puzzled young husband, the older man's overdoting daughter and her easygoing but finally aroused husband, the jealous but devoted sister, and a garrulous widow not averse to matrimony. These are not stock figures to help carry along a story but very real human beings, and they are high among the play's virtues.

They are particularly well played, too, by June Walker, Lee Philips, Anne Jackson, Martin Balsam, Nancy R. Pollock and Betty Walker, in the order in which I have mentioned the characters. Other lesser roles are excellently managed by Effie Afton, Janet Ward and Joan Chambers. Joshua Logan has staged "Middle of the Night" with his customary showmanlike expertness, and Jo Mielziner's sets capture the correct mood. Despite the gift for attractive sentimental realism, Mr. Chayefsky's play is not in itself a drama of size, but Mr. Robinson gives it that merit.

"MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT"

Play by Paddy Chayefsky; staged by Joshua Logan; settings and lighting by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Motley; incidental music by Lehman Engel; presented by Mr. Logan at the ANTA Theatre, February 8, 1956. The cast:

The Girl.....Gena Rowlands
The Mother.....June Walker
The Kid Sister..Joan Chambers
The Manufacturer.....
Edward G. Robinson
The Sister....Nancy R. Pollock
The Widow.....Betty Walker
The Daughter.....Anne Jackson
The Neighbor.....Effie Afton
The Friend.....Janet Ward
The Husband.....Lee Philips
The Son-in-Law..Martin Balsam

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

February 9, 1956

'Middle of Night' at ANTA

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

In the field of literal, realistic playwrighting, so popular nowadays, it is inconceivable that anyone can go any further than Paddy Chayevsky has in "Middle of the Night."

The new drama at the ANTA hews in every way to the line that a play should seem overheard. It has a situation, rather than a story. The dialogue repeats, interrupts and overlaps, as ordinary conversation does.

The players abet this conception with casual projection, which is sometimes altogether inaudible.

Cheaper Ways?

When the play is at its best, in the family conclaves of the young girl, or of the man 30 years older whom she wants to marry, it is observant, warm and infinitely, believably human.

When it persistently worries its humdrum subject, it makes one certain that there are cheaper ways of meeting just such people than sitting in a theater listening to them relate every thought they have had.

The meat of the play is quite simply the uproar caused in the two households when the couple announces its intention to wed. The girl's mother is stubbornly outraged because of the man's age and the fact that he is Jewish.

Hysterically Bitter.

The man's jealous sister is hysterically bitter. His daughter amazes herself by pompously lecturing her adored father.

I think Chayevsky has created for himself a nearly unsurmountable obstacle to the play's effectiveness by making the girl neurotic and infantile. So insubstantial a character is she that one is amazed to find the evening's best sequence taking place in her absence.

Gena Rowlands is a most remarkably versatile and efficient young actress, able to imitate any known emotion. She is here unable to endow her character with any charm, and, as a result, her highly able histrionics project a mildly interesting, but unappealing heroine.

Robinson Hailed.

Edward G. Robinson plays the older man with a soft glow and the most effective relaxation. He is believable and sympathetic, and makes you feel he has something at stake for which you urgently hope he will find a resolution.

There are numerous splendid acting jobs in smaller roles. June Walker is dynamic and positive as the girl's petty, hard working mother. Nancy R. Pollack does a first rate job on the spinster sister.

Anne Jackson, suddenly in the middle of the second act, plays a sequence which as time goes on may well prove the play's most memorable. With Martin Balsam, she quietly, brilliantly depicts endless facets of a healthy, vigorous young marriage. It is a surprising, lovely job.

Appropriately Vain.

Betty Walker has an uncanny, telling bit at the start, and Lee Philips is appropriately vain and rattling as the girl's husband.

Some condescending titles are projected on the curtain between scenes, explaining time lapses which are perfectly clear from the text.

The highly apt Mielziner scenes shift with magical speed. Joshua Logan has directed the play with casual deftness perfectly fitting its content and mood.

In its declared scope it is undoubtedly fine. But it reminds you of conversations overheard in the subway or through a wall. It makes me long, with its trivial familiarity, for Rupert of Hentzau and Beverly of Graustark.

The New York Times
February 9, 1956

Theatre: Edward G. Robinson Back

He Stars in 'Middle of Night,' by Chayefsky

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IT seems like old times to have Edward G. Robinson back.

As a matter of fact, he is back on the stage where he used to perform before he settled down in Hollywood. For the ANTA Theatre, where "Middle of the Night" opened last evening, was the Guild Theatre when he was working for a living.

As a middle-aged garment manufacturer in Paddy Chayefsky's drama, Mr. Robinson gives a winning and skillful performance. No one could be more relaxed about a part. But no one could give the character more warmth or tenderness, or make an undistinguished man seem so notable.

By naming all his characters "The Girl," "The Manufacturer," "The Sister," and so on, Mr. Chayefsky apparently means to suggest that they are ordinary people. So they are. Although Mr. Robinson does not make the manufacturer extraordinary, he makes him human and disarming, and very pleasant company for an evening in the theatre.

"Middle of the Night," which is billed as "a love story," is the tale of a widower, aged 53, who falls in love with a blonde, aged 24. Mr. Chayefsky has written it in a minor key, deliberately holding down the emotion and laying emphasis on the homeliness of the material. Everyone is intentionally average — the manufacturer and his daughter and sister; the blonde and her mother, sister and impulsive husband.

The reactions to a love affair between a middle-aged man and a girl who is younger than his daughter are average, and the dialogue is composed of average talk. Toward his material Mr. Chayefsky has a kind of O. Henry sense of familiarity. Apparently it is part of his design to underwrite the plot.

In "Marty," the celebrated screen play that Mr. Chayefsky wrote, this method resulted in a thoroughly delightful picture. The method is less successful in the theatre, where size is more important. The play that is underwritten may turn out not to be as picturesque as Mr. Chayefsky probably imagined. Without some pressure back of it the average may emerge as dullness in the theatre.

When Mr. Robinson is not on the stage, dullness is always lurking around the edges of Mr. Chayefsky's play. What we are left with is rather spiritless narrative frequently punctuated with a scene so honest and poignant that it brings the audience and the play quickly to life at the same time. Mr. Chayefsky has a particular talent for writing about the temperament of his Jewish family. He describes the homelife of a garment manufacturer with taste and authenticity and also with sympathetic humor.

As both producer and director, Joshua Logan has given Mr. Chayefsky's play an inviting production and performance. Jo Mielziner has designed the two settings—one showing the grubbiness of a cheap apartment, the other showing the commonplace comforts of the manfacturer's apartment. Motley has dressed the characters suitably, and Lehman Engel has provided a score that captures the changes in the moods of the story.

Everyone acts well. Gena Rowlands is especially good as the blonde involved in a situation that she does not know how to handle. June Walker as the mother, Anne Jackson as the daughter, Nancy R. Pollock as the sister, Betty Walker as a talkative widow, Lee Philips as the husband, Martin Balsam as the son-in-law give plausible, impeccable performances. There is never anything wrong with anything about "Middle of the Night."

But Mr. Chayefsky's intentional cultivation of the average and the obvious has its own limitations. It cannot wholly escape being average drama. What saves it is Mr. Robinson's quiet authority as an actor. It is good to be reminded of his easy skill and to have him back with us again.

Journal-American
February 9, 1956

Town Has New Hit Starring Robinson

Chayefsky's Homely Theme Is Turned Into Stark Drama

By JOHN McCLAIN

IT COMES as a mighty revelation to almost nobody that Joshua Logan has brought a new hit into the city. In "Middle of the Night" which opened last evening at the ANTA Theatre he has combined his best abilities as producer and director, insured them with the services of Edward G. Robinson, as star, added the sultry blandishments of a beguiling newcomer named Gena Rowlands and stirred them into a homely goulash concocted by Paddy Chayefsky.

What emerges is arresting, brilliant and often great.

Because of his fast ascendancy with the movie "Marty," the author has been dismissed in some quarters as a one-day wonder. This would seem to refute that, for he exhibits a rare gift of fashioning scenes from the simple ingredients of mediocre emotions.

The manners and speech of his people are as commonplace as a "no parking" sign but he manages to build them through his talent for delineation into figures of enormous human values. This is good writing.

The theme of "Middle of the Night" is the stark consideration of what happens to a cloak-and-suit widower, aged 53, who finds himself suddenly in love with a girl of 24. There are no great plot gyrations, no symbolism, no messages.

The obvious questions are posed: Can such an alliance possibly succeed; can companionship overcome physical limitations? The plot is tiny and tenuous, but before the evening is out it has become titanic.

That it becomes so thoroughly engaging is due to a series of superior elements in the theatre. The production is ingenious: Two full sets which can be changed back and forth with the speed of a television dissolve; a bright lantern slide which flashes the time of day on the curtain just before it rises.

Add to this a thoughtful and commanding performance by Mr. Robinson, as the aging executive, and a notable "first" for Miss Rowlands.

Novice Praised

Here is a bright feather for Mr. Logan's hat band—a young lady possessing much of the obvious equipment of Miss Monroe and still having a true sense of timing and dramatic deportment. It has been many a moon since so decorative a novice has acquitted herself with such distinction.

The fine hand of Mr. Logan is also to be seen in the casting and resulting efforts of June Walker, as the girl's mother; Nancy R. Pollock, as Robinson's sister; Anne Jackson, as his daughter; Lee Phillips as the husband, and Martin Balsam, as the son-in-law.

It may be that Mr. Chayefsky will inaugurate something new in the modern theatre. He appears to be capable of creating drama from normal, middle-class people.

What a relief!

Daily Mirror
February 9, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Middle of the Night' Is a Provocative Hit

• Edward G. Robinson and Gena Rowlands play roles superbly.

"Middle of the Night" is a tender and touching play about two maladjusted people seeking a little happiness. The girl is 24, and the man in his early 50's. She has never known love, and he lost it when his wife died. They are restless to the verge of hysteria.

She is married to a flip, egotistical musician. He wants to play the peacock, and cannot understand why she craves affection and attention. Something, incidentally, that she's never gotten from her family. The elderly man is decent, sympathetic and lonely, too. They are both afraid of the future, afraid of making fools of themselves.

THEIR FAMILIES are shocked by this proposed alliance between May and September, and the principals have their doubts, also. But in the end they decide to gamble on a measure of enjoyment during what Maxwell Anderson has described as an aging man's "vintage years."

"Middle of the Night" is a first play by Paddy Chayefsky. A briefer version was originally done on TV. This is the same Chayefsky responsible for the film, "Marty." He is a playwright of genuine promise. He can be disarmingly simple, and yet beneath his simplicity stir up whirlpools of emotion.

His people speak a peculiar language, with abrupt transitions from the poignant to the comic. But it is an accurate idiom, illuminating and revealing. It is easily recognizable by New Yorkers, and it also has previously proved that it can be understood beyond the bounds of Manhattan. For the burghers of Philadelphia found it real and human.

"MIDDLE OF THE Night" is notable on several counts. It marks Joshua Logan's bow as a solo producer. It brings Edward G. Robinson back to Broadway after an absence of some 25 years. And it introduces Gena Rowlands, who has stardust in her hair.

Robinson is superb as the elderly garment manufacturer, seeking companionship and frightened of being ridiculous. He is gentle, understanding and choked with this belated onrush of feeling. So intense is his portrayal that the first-nighters were tremendously moved by it.

Miss Rowlands, making her big-time stage debut, did justice to one of the season's most taxing roles. She had to pitch her performance high in the beginning, and then sustain it throughout the evening. She has a thing or two to learn about shadings and contrasts, but she has the ability to project vividly across the footlights.

IF HER DISTURBED girl, bent on getting something better than she has yet known in life is sometimes strident and neurotic, Chayefsky has written her that way. He has practically put her on a psychiatrist's couch at the start, and Logan, doubling as director, keeps her there until the final curtain.

June Walker, as a rather obtuse mother; and Nancy Pollock, as a possessive sister, were vastly appreciated by the initial audience. Salutes are also due Anne Jackson, Joan Chambers, Betty Walker, Effie Afton, Janet Ward, Lee Philips and Martin Balsam.

Jo Milziener has designed fascinating settings, and Motley atmospheric costumes.

"Middle of the Night" is an uneven, honest and provocative play. Faults the ANTA's new tenant has, but its virtues outweigh them. Here is observant and sensitive drama, leavened with laughs when the pressure gets almost too much to bear. In sum, a stirring hit.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**
February 9, 1956

THEATER

'Middle of the Night'

By WALTER F. KERR

IN THE new play at the Anta Theater Edward G. Robinson takes that cigar out of his mouth long enough to hoist a blanketed baby on to his shoulder. On him the baby looks great.

The first thing "The Middle of the Night" does is give Mr. Robinson a chance to work in gentle, quiet depth. The brass has been temorarily muted, the snarl splits the evening just once. As a fifty-three-year-old widower who has come to the time of life when "everybody starts dropping dead around you," he looks wistfully and restlessly at the echoing department he shares with his sister, at the suburban home in which he shares three dinners a week with his daughter. He has, he mournfully notes, a friend who takes pills to prove his virility, another on the verge of suicide.

• • •

When he meets an attractive girl younger than his own daughter, he is cagey. When she finally blurts out her love for him, he is frightened. When he announces their plans for marriage and faces up to the barrage of incredulity and fierce advice from the little world around him, his self-doubt climbs to an agony of despair. The middle of the night is dark indeed, even if that girl turns out to be dawn.

In every conscience-stricken twist and turn of this, Mr. Robinson is precise, honest, warmly affecting. The images are always humbly accurate: whether he is foolishly confiding too much over a telephone, too casually paring an apple as he drops his domestic bombshell, or sitting helpless before the girl who is going to turn him down, the feeling of genuinely lived neighborhood life is exact.

And throughout the evening the alert, snappish, no-nonsense intelligence that glints from behind those puffy, glowering eyes is shrewdly on display. Mr. Robinson gets, in addition, an opportunity to do something he does almost better than any other working actor: describe a longish situation we never see, and make us see it with sizzling clarity. It's a beautifully controlled, absolutely direct performance.

The second thing "The Middle of the Night" does is introduce television-writer Paddy Chayefsky to Broadway. For Broadway, it's a profitable debut. As fans of "Marty" know, this desultory poet of middle-class life has a way with an overheard phrase. The language comes out in stammering, rhythmic repetitions ("Well, how do you feel? Feel all right?"); in blurts of primitive folkside philosophy ("You had a good marriage with George—you paid the rent and went to bed, what more d'you want?"); in snatches of wonderfully irrelevant information ("I called you at three in the morning—New York time").

And Mr. Chayefsky has a devastatingly sharp ear for the small, not unattractive mind. Listen to his minor characters—a daughter sweetly explaining that the lady is a tramp; a son-in-law protesting that he likes the old man; a marriageable matron making gruesomely endearing conversation—and you will hear the accents of polite, unbearable domestic felicity as you have probably heard them all your life.

Reservations about the evening? Yes, indeed. One of them concerns the insistent smallness, the tight-shot range of Mr. Chayefsky's camera. On the wall of an apartment that Jo Mielziner has designed with a keenly attentive eye there hangs a clutter of snapshots: you can't quite make them out, but you know pretty well the high-school postures that must be there. Mr. Chayefsky's play is like those snapshots: minute, confined, randomly composed. His language, in addition, is still only accurate: it wants an edge, a little swelling in size, a little sifting and compressing to make it a distillation of familiar speech rather than a demonstration of it.

There is one other thing. In drawing the girl who brings such warmth into the chilly twilight Mr. Robinson inhabits, the author has been perfunctory. He has given us little to like about her; he has dissolved his way through a key passage in which the flame ignites; he has let her become too much the infantile, steadily weeping nonentity the other characters call her. Perhaps Mr. Chayefsky is being honorably astringent, scorning cheap sentiment. Perhaps Gena Rowlands, the fair-haired, dark-eyed, altogether handsome young actress who plays her, is being unnecessarily overwrought, bearing down too stubbornly on the despair. She is not everything one would wish for Mr. Robinson.

Otherwise, things are in very good hands. Joshua Logan has directed with a spare and quiet perception. Anne Jackson is an utter delight as she explains to her father how neurotic he is, June Walker shifts gears in midspeech with an engagingly abstracted air, and Nancy Pollock, Betty Walker, Janet Ward, Lee Philips, and Martin Balsam pin down those back-seat drivers with canny insight.

Mr. Chayefsky will, I hope, write more complex and more vigorous plays. But he is, sure enough, a writer. And Mr. Robinson is back to help make a visit worth your theater-going time.

DAILY NEWS

February 9, 1956

Edward G. Robinson Comes Back To Stage in 'Middle of the Night'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Edward G. Robinson was a very good actor when he dazzled first-nighters, including myself, in a melodrama called "The Racket" more than one-fourth of a century ago. He still is a very good actor and maybe I have become a very bad first-nighter. Robinson reappeared on the living stage last evening in a romantic drama called "Middle of the Night," produced and directed by Joshua Logan at the ANTA Theatre, and I felt it was scarcely worth his while coming all the way across the continent for his reincarnation. He should have stood in movies.

"Middle of the Night" is a soapera by Paddy Chayefsky, a script writer who won prizes, renown and possibly wealth for a filmed testimonial to the hopeless ordinariness of the human race called "Marty." I would say that "Middle of the Night" is a live-stage testimonial to the hopeless ordinariness of Chayefsy's resources as a dramatist.

Some Juicy Lines

In this play Robinson is an elderly gent (he confesses right out loud, "I'm 53") who falls in love with a young woman. I have made sketchy notes on Chayefsky's dialog for this piece, and so far as I can tell the key line is "We'll get married as soon as your divorce comes through."

There are many other excellent 21-inch-screen lines, such as: "I want to know love, Jerry, but I don't know what it is." "I want to be loved by a woman." "Pop, how's your sex life?" "Your father abandoned me when." "I've been building up all day like a volcano." "Is he going to be able to satisfy you sexually?" "Are you finished in the bathroom?" "That was just a physical thing." "I don't want to go back to just paying the rent and going to sleep."

Robinson is a dynamic and convincing actor and Logan is a dynamic and convincing producer-director, so "Middle of the Night" has been given a much better production than it deserves. The supporting cast includes an attractive newcomer, Gena Rowlands, as the lass whose divorce may be coming through, and stout and stalwart players like June Walker, Anne Jackson and Effie Afton. There are a couple of settings by Jo Mielziner.

"The Innkeepers"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

February 3, 1956

THEATER

'The Innkeepers'

By WALTER F. KERR

GERALDINE PAGE and I walked out on Darren McGavin at the same time Thursday night—it was the final curtain—but I was ahead of her in spirit, I can tell you that.

Not that I blame actor McGavin for the bad time he gave me at the Golden. He has done everything that the author of "The Innkeepers" required, and he has done it, on the whole, very well. He has been willing to snarl at his pregnant wife, bark at his best friend, insulted the customers of the inn he runs, writhe on the floor, sob regularly, and finally crawl on his hands and knees before the whole living world. Not a moan or a yawp of this is done grudgingly; Mr. McGavin is a good sport.

• • •

But author Theodore Apstein has trapped him — and some other perfectly accomplished players—in what is essentially an intolerable dramatic situation. Every one in the visible universe is wrong. To begin with, the general political climate of America is wrong because it has whisked away his government job on the grounds that his wife was a Communist for six months at the age of seventeen.

Mr. McGavin is wrong because he has quit. Running off to Mexico and immersing himself in the business of classifying ancient urns and jewels—symbolically, he works in Tomb 104—he is steadily and bitterly falling in love with Death. And his wife is wrong, too, not just because, in her giddy, girlish way, she tends to louse up his working arrangements by her telephone conversations, but because she is the champion complainer of 1956 (I hope).

• • •

The underlying materials of the play are timely, provocative, inherently interesting. Your ears perk up a bit as Boris Tumarin, playing a writer who has fled from his Communist-dominated country, quietly asks "If Americans can become refugees, what hope is there?" Occasionally a genuine tension catches its breath on the stage: when our dispossessed hero discovers that the only American job open to him is a back-room job in which his name will never be used, there is a decided sting to the ensuing silence.

But Mr. Apstein is at least as much interested in characterization as he is in probing a national dilemma, and his way with characterization is relentless. His people work on a single, painful, ultimately monotonous pitch; self-pity engulfs them in a way that is no more believable than it is attractive; movement is arrested for prolonged hints at inner sorrows and a great deal of anguished lip-biting; the net result out front is a state of irritation that would be profitable only to an audience of oysters.

• • •

Director Jose Quintero would seem to have done everything possible to establish a taut, plausible, escape-ridden atmosphere. For a very long time, while burbling tourists are worrying over the Mexican-fried beans and expatriate Tumarin is pointedly philosophizing, he has kept the pressure low and the suffering casual. And when the work does erupt into passionate self-loathing, he is ready to use stage patterns that are vigorous and graphic—if not moving.

As the wife who cannot bear to watch a good man's disintegration, Geraldine Page gives her customarily fragile, wavering, brokenly wistful performance. It is a little too persistently fragile, I think, to be of much use here; a real haymaker somewhere along the way might have helped. Joe Maross eases the scratchy surface a bit with his comparatively boisterous and good-natured friend, Jean Barker and Truman Smith do very nicely with a talkative couple from Winnetka, and Mr. Tumarin's sadly experienced runaway is excellent.

"The Innkeepers," for all the assembled talent, pretty much rests its case on Mr. McGavin's nerve-wracked confession, "Every time I open my mouth I hurt you." The statement is true; but the practice does not make for a stimulating play.

"THE INKEEPERS"

Play by Theodore Apstein; staged by Jose Quintero; setting and lighting by David Hays; costumes by Guy Kent; presented by Gordon W. Pollock in association with Richard Cook and Peter Flournoy at the John Golden Theatre, February 2, 1956. The cast:

Esperanza.....Miriam Colon
Santiago.....Ernesto Gonzalez
Amy McGregor...Geraldine Page
David McGregor..Darren McGavin
Georg Mainzer...Boris Tumarin
Rose Haddock.....Jean Barker
Jim Haddock.....Truman Smith
The Butter and Cheese Woman..
Carmen Zapata
Lupe.....Sandra Zapata
Refugio.....Anita De Soto
Howard.....Joe Maross

Daily Mirror

February 3, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'The Innkeepers' Is Dull—A Deadly Bore

• Geraldine Page and Darrin McGavin are capable, but play just isn't.

If you're planning a trip to Mexico, skip the Paradise Inn in Oaxaca. It's as dull as a silver plate that hasn't seen polish in a couple of years. Not that it isn't a picturesque enough place, but the conversation thereabouts is a deadly bore.

The Paradise is run by a couple of proprietors, impersonated by Geraldine Page and Darren McGavin. But even these players, who were so delightful last season in "The Rainmaker," can't liven up the premises. Seldom have we heard so many words spouted to so little purpose as in "The Innkeepers."

AMY AND DAVID McGregor are exiles from the U. S. He was bounced from the State Department as a security risk, because his wife had joined the Communist Party for six months at the age of 17. Since then, they have been fleeing from town to town refusing to face facts.

In the end, Amy insists on going back to New York to have a baby, and fight to clear up her status. As she strolls out the Paradise door toward the final curtain, Dave is sprawled on the floor, feeling pretty sorry for himself. And as we exited, we were feeling pretty sorry for ourself.

Theodore Apstein penned the new arrival at the John Golden Theatre. Gordon W. Pollock produced, and Jose Quintero directed it. David Hays has provided an attractive background, in which the piece rattles around interminably. It really deserves better talk and more action.

MISS PAGE, McGavin, Boris Tumarin, Joe Maross, Jean Barker and Truman Smith take a heck of a beating. They try to make their dialogue add up to something and their characters important. But even Garrick, Booth and Mrs. Siddons couldn't have turned this antidote for insomnia into a play.

By our watch, we spent only a bit more than two hours in the Paradise Inn, but it seemed like a long weekend. Take our advice, and pass up this horrendous hostelry when you journey south of the border. Try one of the caravansaries in Acapulco or Taxco instead.

You'll have more fun in either spot than with "The Innkeepers" at Oaxaca. That's a dolorous deadfall, indeed!

Journal-American

February 3, 1956

Exile Story Doesn't Jell

Play on U. S. Refugee Couple In Mexico Opens at the Golden

By JOHN McCLAIN

IN A LITTLE NUMBER called "The Innkeepers," which opened at the John Golden Theatre last night, we are introduced to an engaging American couple who have sought refuge in Oaxaca, Mexico, because the husband can't pursue his promising career in the U.S. Why can't the husband pursue his career in the U.S.? Because his wife was a member of the Communist Party for a short period, 15 years previously, when she was a minor.

To this I have a short reply, but since there are ladies present, I will merely say, "Balderdash!"

Having thus failed to go along even grudgingly with the play's premise I found it increasingly difficult to feel any emotional rapport with what followed: the arrival of the old pal with the offer of a compromise job in New York; the hostility of two tourists who hear the horrendous truth; the final, agonizing moments in which the husband bares his inner cowardice.

Such a 'Fate'

Much has been made, and with some justice, of the fate which has befallen citizens once allied with subversive organizations, but I have yet to hear of a husband whose whole life has been ruined by the fact that his wife was a temporary traveler in her youth. This is flimsy reporting and it seems to me exceedingly poor public relations in these edgy moments in the world's history.

Apart from that, "The Innkeepers" is not a very good play. It is a slow starter, and when the subject at hand is finally broached it goes off with the percussion of a dropped sponge. Granted the young husband has been handed a bum shake there never seems a valid reason for his not going home and making a small fight for himself.

There is an effort to explain this in the last act on a basis of his personal insecurity, but by this time one has almost come to the conclusion that America's loss is also Mexico's loss. Let him stay in Oaxaca—they deserve each other.

In many ways this seems a pity, for Darren McGavin gives the part of the husband a good Sunday try; he is terribly masculine and tormented, and when he finally blows his sombrero and turns on his bride the chandeliers rattle.

As the wife Geraldine Page gives one of her familiar lilting, compressed-lip performances, working around a bed to good effect. She has the gift of bringing great pathos to minor moments, and here the material is abundant. Joe Marros and Boris Tumarin toil gallantly with inconsiderable characterizations.

The subject of the "blacklist" and its far-reaching effects has been attempted before and probably will be again. There may be a good play there—but this isn't it.

DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER
February 3, 1956

'The Innkeepers' a Static Drama Based on a 'Security Risk' Theme

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Theodore Apstein's play "The Innkeepers," which opened last evening at the John Golden Theatre, has more of a sense of character than it does of event. It is intelligently written, it has been directed with quiet authority by Jose Quintero and it is being expertly played by Geraldine Page and Darren McGavin in the leading roles; but it has only one point to make and it takes almost three acts to get to the point—and the point isn't very dramatic anyhow.

McGavin plays a man who has been branded a security risk and let out of a Washington job because he has married a woman (Miss Page) who held a brief membership in the Communist Party 15 years ago, when she was 17 years old and an exalted and misguided schoolgirl. Now these two are on the lam—self-appointed refugees from their own country. They operate an inn in Oaxaca, a village a hundred or so miles south of Mexico City, and he also works on a local archaeological project.

Should Have Gone Home

Both are desperately homesick, and author Apstein's point is, when he gets to it, that they should never have run away in the first place. By the time they got to this last evening, I didn't much care whether they came home or stayed.

Miss Page gives one of her tremulous performanes and McGavin does a manly job of taking the rap for his wife. When these two are together, Quintero uses a convincing trick that few directors have tried and only the Lunts have perfected—the simple device of having people talk through each other's lines, which happens all the time in real life.

The tenants of the inn include a typical brace of American tourists, played typically by Jean Barker and Truman Smith, and a real refugee—a Czech without a country now—acted quietly and persuasively by Boris Tumarin. There are a number of minor characters who lend a Mexican atmosphere, and David Hays' design for a Mexican inn is a pleasant one.

"The Innkeepers" has been earnestly conceived but rather laboriously born, and it doesn't really come to life until the play is almost over.

The New York Times
February 3, 1956

Theatre: 'Innkeepers'

Play About Exiles Is Staged at Golden

By BROOKS ATKINSON

THEODORE APSTEIN'S "The Innkeepers," which opened at the John Golden last evening, is a mild play on a fiery subject.

It dramatizes the plight of a young American husband and wife who have exiled themselves to Mexico because the Government has dismissed him as a security risk. There is nothing incriminating in his file. But twelve or fifteen years ago his wife spent six months in the Communist party when she was 17 years of age. That is the background of the situation. It has destroyed his career. Now, as he broods on it, it is destroying his soul.

Perhaps it is unfair to expect a playwright to make something tangible and penetrating out of this nebulous situation. It involves too many things that cannot be explained in concrete terms—too many unnamed fears, too many shadows, too many undercurrents, too many demoniac forces that cannot be recognized or defined. Not wanting to write a propaganda or thesis play, Mr. Apstein has set himself the task of expressing his subject through the souls of his two principal characters, and it must be confessed that he has not really succeeded.

There is one vivid line in the play. A refugee from Europe remarks to the husband: "If Americans have to be refugees what hope is there?" That puts Mr. Apstein's theme into perspective. It brings a point of view to his play.

But it is to be feared that his tale with a Mexican setting is otherwise undistinguished. It looks and sounds too much like a great many other plays in which Mexican servants chatter and scurry through a house rented to Americans. It is a play composed of fiestas, quaint customs, smiling servility, American tourists buying junk and an expatriate European man of letters providing Continental wisdom.

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The writing of "The Innkeepers" is ordinary. The prose style is flat. If Mr. Apstein is unequal to the task of bringing this theme alive it is only fair to add that more experienced writers than he is would have trouble in mastering it.

Under José Quintero's direction, the actors do everything they can to make the author's point. As the wife, Geraldine Page gives a remarkably perceptive performance that is responsive to every nuance. Her speaking voice is a little colorless and occasionally inaudible. But her talent for understanding one character in relation to other characters is rare and sensitive.

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And Darren McGavin brings some passionate convictions to the part of the husband. He recovers the drama from the doldrums at the end of the second act when the author gets down to cases. Boris Tumarin's reserved but civilized European novelist is intelligently expressed. As the American tourists, Jean Barker and Truman Smith are excellent, especially in the last act when the author gives them something real to work with. Joe Maross gives an attractive performance as an old friend who has come from New York.

"The Innkeepers" has an inviting and beautifully lighted Mexican setting, designed by David Hays, and Guy Kent's costumes, particularly for Miss Page, have taste and charm. But the play as a whole does not get very deep inside the subject. With all proper respect for Mr. Apstein's principle, the subject is big and the play is small.